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Interview with

Bob M. Atchley

June 9, 1976

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Bob M. Atchley
(Signature)

Date: June 9, 1976

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Oral History Collection

Bob M. Atchley

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: June 9, 1976

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Bob Atchley for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 9, 1976, in Dallas, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Atchley in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at the U.S. Navy Mobile Hospital Number Two during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Bob, to begin this interview, would you just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Atchley: I was born in Lakeview, Texas, on January 12, 1921. My education was finishing high school . . . and then the "University of Hard Knocks." (chuckle)

Dr. Marcello: When did you join the Navy?

Mr. Atchley: I joined the Navy on November 23, 1940.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

Atchley: Well, I guess, you could say for adventure, but that's not really true. Jobs were fairly scarce, and I took ROTC in high school, and I liked the military angle. There was a lieutenant in the fire department that had retired from the Navy, and he was kind of instrumental in me joining the Navy.

Marcello: I was going to ask you why you decided to join the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service.

Atchley: Well, I found out I made the right choice (chuckle).

Marcello: At the time that you entered the service, had you been keeping very closely abreast with world events, either in Europe or in the Pacific?

Atchley: No.

Marcello: Okay, where did you take your boot camp?

Atchley: San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in San Diego during boot camp that you think ought to be part of the record?

Atchley: Well, not to say that I'm superstitious, but having taken ROTC in high school--I was a platoon leader of some sort--and I made the aviation radio school. I was the only one in my company that made it, which I was fairly proud of. But two or three weeks before we graduated, I had a run-in with our chief, who was our CO, and he knocked me out of the radio school. As I look back, I found that that was one of the best things that ever happened to me because if I

had gone through the school and graduated, I would have been a tail gunner on a torpedo plane off an aircraft carrier (chuckle), and I wouldn't be making this interview probably.

Marcello: (Chuckle) At the time that you were in boot camp at San Diego, had they already cut back on the amount of time that you spent in boot camp, or were you still going through under the old system?

Atchley: They had cut it back some, right.

Marcello: I guess this was probably some indication that there was a sense of urgency in your training and that they wanted to get you out to the fleet just as soon as possible.

Atchley: Well, that's probably true, but it didn't enter my mind. I wasn't thinking from that angle.

Marcello: Where'd you go from boot camp in San Diego?

Atchley: Well, they was asking for volunteers for the Hospital Corps, and this same lieutenant in the fire department that talked me into going in the Navy, he told me to make any kind of a school before I went to sea; otherwise, I'd be on the deck force for two or three years. So I volunteered for the Hospital Corps School and went through the Hospital Corps School at Balboa there in San Diego.

Marcello: What sort of training did you receive there at the Hospital Corps School? In other words, was it good training? Fair

training? How would you describe it?

Atchley: Well, comparing it with the medics that I ran into later in the Army, we got excellent training and more advanced training, unless they got independent duty training, which some of them did, too.

Marcello: How long did this school last?

Atchley: I can't remember--probably three months, somewhere around there.

Marcello: Now what rank would you have had when you came out of that school, that is, when you graduated?

Atchley: I was a seaman second class. At that they call it HA-2--hospital apprentice second class.

Marcello: In other words, it was a little bit different from the way the system works today. Normally, I think, when one goes through one of these schools today, he comes out as a third class petty officer.

Atchley: That's true. A lot longer school, though--more advanced school, probably.

Marcello: Okay, so you get out of Hospital Corps School. Where did you go from there?

Atchley: Then I was stationed at Mayo Hospital, San Diego, sort of in limbo until they could figure where they wanted to send the graduating class. While there, they sent us to the Marine Training School at Camp Elliott.

Marcello: I assume that you went from San Diego, then, over to Pearl Harbor?

Atchley: Right.

Marcello: When did this occur?

Atchley: Probably the latter part of September or the first part of October of '41.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Atchley: I thought it was great.

Marcello: Why was that?

Atchley: (Chuckle) Well, from all that you heard from the Hawaiian Islands . . . and, let's see, what can you say about the women (chuckle)? And, of course, just the adventure of going, leaving the United States, which I had never done before.

Marcello: Did you go directly from San Diego to your permanent station in Honolulu?

Atchley: No. We were sort of a pre-commissioning unit. We built the hospital after we got there. It was shipped over on a ship, and a bunch of hospital coprsmen actually dug all the post holes for these pre-fab buildings. Then we had some carpenter's mates and electricians and so forth that were stationed there. We built the whole thing ourselves.

Marcello: How large a hospital was this altogether?

Atchley: I cannot remember.

Marcello: How large was it, let's say, in terms of the number of beds and facilities and things of that nature?

Atchley: That's what I was trying to think of--how many beds the hospital had. I don't really have any idea, although we had a regular operating room, an eye, ear, nose, and throat operating room, and X-ray. We had the full facilities, and we were set to take care of the fleet. We took care of all the fleet that come in, so it was a fairly good size.

Marcello: Now this was, of course, U.S. Navy Mobile Hospital Number Two. Were there several other hospitals on the islands, or was this the only one?

Atchley: None that I know of.

Marcello: Where was it located?

Atchley: It was located in Aiea. Actually, we called it Aiea Heights. It was up above a little old village of Aiea, sitting on a big flat place. They flattened the top of one of them little mountains there. That's where we built it.

Marcello: How long did it take to build this hospital?

Atchley: Well, it wasn't finished at the attack, and they set up some emergency wards and brought patients in. It was finished probably a month or two after Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: But I gather that, even though it wasn't finished at the time of the actual attack itself, it was still in operation before that.

Atchley: No, it wasn't in operation as a hospital.

Marcello: Oh, not at all?

Atchley: No. In fact, we just took care of minor cases, and the serious cases that were brought up, we had to take them back down to the main hospital.

Marcello: Was this the Tripler?

Atchley: No, it was the Pearl Harbor Hospital in Pearl Harbor--the Navy hospital.

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that you got to Honolulu sometime around September of '41. What was the atmosphere like there, that is, in terms of any attention given to the Japanese or toward Japan or anything of that nature? Were you able to sense any tension or urgency in what you observed there at Honolulu during this period before Pearl Harbor?

Atchley: I would say none, and probably because we had a Navy captain, I believe, that was trying to make admiral, and we were restricted. We weren't allowed to go on liberty for thirty-something days because he was trying to get this hospital built in a hurry to make a name for himself. So we didn't make contact with anybody but the people we were associated with the Navy. Digging post holes all day and eating as much food as we could and sleeping was about all we done.

Marcello: Kind of ironic, is it not, that one of the reasons you became a corpsman was to get off the deck force, and here you are, in

effect, doing a great deal of the type of work that somebody on the deck force would be doing?

Atchley: Right, or Seabees or what-have-you.

Marcello: (Chuckle) Okay, where were you living at this time, that is, while the hospital was being constructed?

Atchley: We were living down at the main hospital in Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: During this period, were you also undergoing any further training, that is, on-the-job training to be a corpsman or anything of this nature?

Atchley: No, we already finished our training for hospital corpsman.

Marcello: In other words, you were not yet putting into practice what you had learned in the Hospital Corps School?

Atchley: Right.

Marcello: You were simply doing this construction at the time.

Atchley: Right. Building the hospital.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that it was at least thirty days after you got there before you got liberty. What was the liberty routine like here after you finally did begin to receive liberty?

Atchley: Well, actually I don't think we really got on liberty after December the seventh (chuckle), that I can remember. We might have, but I don't remember it. But at that time, of course, you had to be back by dark. There wasn't anyone allowed ashore after dark. Since I didn't learn to drink, I spent

most of my time either playing golf or bowling or going to the show and what-have-you.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had to be back by dark. Do you mean that you had to be back by twelve o'clock? Now the reason that I ask that question is that I know the sailors who were attached to the fleet in Pearl . . . most of them had to be back aboard ship at twelve midnight when they had liberty.

Atchley: No, ours was, like, if it got dark at seven o'clock, we had to be back by seven o'clock.

Marcello: Was there any reason for such a restriction?

Atchley: Well, now this was, you know, right after Pearl Harbor; of course, later on, this was different.

Marcello: I'm referring now to the period before Pearl Harbor.

Atchley: Yes, well, now before Pearl Harbor, I don't remember us going on liberty. This was after Pearl Harbor and after things had calmed down. Then later on, we got regular liberty--overnight liberty or what-have-you.

Marcello: Now during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, when you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind? You obviously had seen quite a few of them here in the Hawaiian Islands.

Atchley: Well, I think that the biggest percentage of the population was Japanese.

Marcello: That's true.

Atchley: But intermarriages and stuff, you know, with the Chinese and Hawaiians and the whites, well, you know, you couldn't say specifically, "Well, that is a Japanese," or "That is a Chinese." I mean, there's a few of them, but you didn't . . . and as far as the Japanese, they didn't concern me anymore than anyone else as far as likes or dislikes.

Marcello: As relations between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, did you ever give any thought at all to the possibility of any sort of a surprise attack on the Hawaiian Islands?

Atchley: None at all.

Marcello: Did you ever hear any of your shipmates talk about such a possibility?

Atchley: No.

Marcello: I gather, then, that you felt rather safe and secure there in the Hawaiian Islands, even as tensions continued to build between the two countries.

Atchley: Yes. At the age I was at that time, which was probably, what, about nineteen or twenty, I wasn't really concerned. I didn't even pay much attention to the tensions, and the war was actually farthest thing from my mind until that morning.

Marcello: Okay, this, I think, more or less exhausts most of my preliminary questions, so what I'd like to do at this point is talk about the days immediately prior to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and then get into the actual attack itself.

Now what I want you to do at this point is to discuss, in as much detail as you can remember, what your routine and activities were on Saturday, December 6, 1941, from the time you got up until the time you went to bed. How much can you reconstruct about what you did on that Saturday prior to the actual attack?

Atchley: Well, as the best I can remember, at that time we were living at the mobile hospital. The baths weren't completed, but we were living there. The windows weren't in, but we had bunks. Of course, the weather didn't bother you, so we were living there. Our food was being cooked in GI cans. We were digging post holes a good bit of the time, and then we were putting these buildings together. So the food tasted real good out of these GI cans. I presume that I worked all day.

Marcello: Even on Saturday?

Atchley: Right.

Marcello: This brings up an interesting question, perhaps, one I could have asked earlier. What was the morale like among the people who were here at the hospital during this period while it was being constructed?

Atchley: The camaraderie was real good, but the morale was low (chuckle). All the officers and the enlisted people had a pretty good hate for our commanding officer--not hate in a strict sense

of the word, but the fact that we didn't get to go on liberty, and he was working us too hard and this sort of thing. There was a few of us that would slip off down to Aiea when we wasn't supposed to, and we might have that Saturday--I don't know--and eat a civilian dinner or breakfast. They had a small cafe down there.

Marcello: How many people were there at this hospital altogether?
You would probably have to estimate this, of course.

Atchley: I would have to estimate it, and I would say probably around a hundred, somewhere in that neighborhood. I might miss it, but I'd think it'd be at least a hundred, possibly more.

Marcello: Okay, and these were all people associated with the Hospital Corps in some way or another?

Atchley: No, we also had carpenters and shipfitters and boatswain's mates--anyone that'd be, I guess, connected with trying to build a mobile hospital. This was actually set up as a mobile unit where you could put it aboard ship and take it ashore and set it up, so it had to have different types of people, although there's no way in the world they could have moved that hospital once it was built.

Marcello: What was the purpose in building that hospital there? Weren't there simply enough hospital facilities at Pearl Harbor to take care of the needs of the Pacific Fleet and so on?

Atchley: Well, getting back to what you said awhile ago about going

through boot camp in a quicker period and so on, well, maybe they were looking into the future about the fact that they were going to build up this area maybe because of things they knew. The main hospital was an old hospital, and, of course, it was limited to what it could do and couldn't expand. I presume, this mobile hospital . . . it might have been just a way of getting experience to see how they would work out in case they needed to have them to put at different places around the world. Eventually, they did build a new main hospital right down below us, and our place was eventually de-commissioned and set up as a base hospital down in the harbor.

Marcello: Okay, let's get back to what we were talking about a little while ago. I believe you were describing your routine on Saturday, December 6, 1941. Would you pick up the story from this point?

Atchley: Well, I don't remember any specific detail--just a normal routine day.

Marcello: But you did stay on the base that evening as far as you can remember?

Atchley: Right, right. I know I did. And everybody up there did, too, that didn't slip off (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, I assume that you retired, then, at a rather reasonable hour. So I guess this would bring us into that Sunday of

December 7, 1941, and once more I want you to describe in detail, as much as you can remember, about what happened that day from the time you got up until all hell broke loose.

Atchley: Well, the first thing I remember . . . of course, I got up and went down and ate chow. Then I came back and . . . of course, there wasn't any women at this hospital at this time, and we had a shower that was enclosed, but where we shaved and stuff was outside. I just wrapped a towel around me and had some slippers on, and I was shaving.

Marcello: What sort of a day was it in terms of climate and weather?

Atchley: Like most days in Pearl Harbor--beautiful, I presume (chuckle). The weather, I remember, was completely clear.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story.

Atchley: And next to our little hill was another hill called Red Hill, which, I believe, the civilians had. I don't know how long they were in the process of digging into the mountain, maybe making . . . there was a lot of explosions and stuff going on, which we had gotten used to. When the attack started, I presume I probably heard a few explosions before I actually turned around, and I might say that we had a perfect view of the harbor from Aiea.

Marcello: I was going to ask you about that.

Atchley: Perfect view. We had perfect view of the whole harbor. I guess these explosions were happening quicker than usual,

and for some reason or other, I guess I turned around. When I turned around and looked down toward the harbor, I knew something was happening because I believe . . . I actually believe I saw the Arizona get hit. I think that's what . . . I realized that something had happened then. It seemed like there was a hit on the Arizona, and it seemed like a big explosion or a big ball of black smoke and what-have-you.

Marcello: About how far were you from the harbor?

Atchley: I have no idea.

Marcello: Again, you would probably have to estimate this.

Atchley: Maybe a couple of miles. That'd be just an estimation.

Then at that time, I ran in the barracks, and some people, of course, on Sunday morning were still sleeping in.

Marcello: What did you think it was when you saw explosions down in the bay?

Atchley: Well, I knew we were being attacked.

Marcello: You did? Had you seen any airplanes, though?

Atchley: No, I don't believe I had saw . . . maybe I did, but I don't remember it. I'm not sure, but I believe the first wave of planes probably were torpedo planes, but I'm not for sure.

Marcello: They were.

Atchley: I ran in the barracks and hollered, "We're being attacked!" or something to that effect. Somebody says, "Go back to sleep! You're dreaming!" or something. I said, "Well, look

out the window if you don't believe me!" And somebody looked out and said, "We are!"

Marcello: Now normally, was a Sunday morning here at the hospital a day of leisure?

Atchley: Right, we didn't have to work on Sunday (chuckle).

Marcello: And you could presumably stay in bed as long as you wished?

Atchley: Right.

Marcello: And I assume that most of the people there were doing this?

Atchley: A good number of them, right. Then by the time I got my clothes on and got outside, some of the other people had gotten up, and we were standing out there gawking, naturally, looking down toward the harbor. At some period of time, one of the Japanese planes . . . presumably it was a torpedo plane because he followed the contour of the land pretty close, and us being at the top of the mountain, he came up and dipped over on the other side. I don't know why because there wasn't nobody shooting at that time (chuckle). But anyway, we knew it was Japanese when we saw that plane.

Marcello: About how much time has elapsed now from the time you first heard the explosions until you ran in the barracks and then came out again to observe what was happening?

Atchley: Probably less than five minutes.

Marcello: Did you have any . . . well, you probably didn't even have any battle station while you were there at this hospital.

Atchley: Right.

Marcello: What did you do at this point?

Atchley: As well as I can remember, once we figured out we were being attacked . . . I don't know how long after this, but then some of our guns started shooting whatever they had to shoot with. I found out later that we were getting some shrapnel up there at our hospital. In fact, we had one man that got killed, and another man got a small injury of some kind.

Marcello: Now this was shrapnel from the guns down in the harbor?

Atchley: Right. We didn't get shot at from the Japanese planes--that I know of. About that time, whenever we started hearing that stuff hitting these tin buildings and stuff, then everybody started scattering. In fact, we was on top of the mountain, and most everybody went over on the other side of the mountain, which was just kind of a jungle, you know. But I got caught. We had a pharmacist, a warrant officer pharmacist, that I presume probably had the levelest head. I don't remember his name; I wish I did. But he had enough sense to know what was going on and had been in the Navy for a long time. So he gathered a bunch of us together, all he could get, you know, and tried to organize us.

Marcello: In other words, up to this time, you hadn't given any thought at all to the fact that there might be casualties coming in.

Atchley: Right. We weren't thinking anything. At this particular time, we had some, I think, two and a half or two-ton flatbed

trucks that we had used hauling material up from the ship when we were building the hospital and stuff, and they also used it as a liberty thing later on. They put boards across the back, and that's the way we went into liberty. But he got a bunch of us in some of those trucks--I wasn't one of them because I ended up being an ambulance driver--and sent them down to the main hospital for the purpose of knowing that there was going to be casualties. He had enough sense to know that. We had . . . I don't know how many field ambulances we had . . . two or three or four field ambulances that were used, you know, for field . . . bring them up because it was so far, you know, from the mobile hospital. So I ended up with one of those.

Marcello: Okay, how shortly after this warrant officer got things organized did you begin being an ambulance driver?

Atchley: It wasn't very long. I can't recollect the time--probably within fifteen or twenty minutes.

Marcello: Okay, so what sort of orders did you receive at that point, then, after you had been assigned to this ambulance? And what happened?

Atchley: Well, as well as I remember, I was told to go down to the yard and just pick up casualties. In fact, there was, I think, two or three of us assigned to this ambulance.

Marcello: You say the yard. You're referring to the Navy Yard?

Atchley: Yes, Pearl Harbor. Right.

Marcello: Okay, describe the drive down to the Navy Yard. Now that's probably a rather interesting experience. Then talk about what happens once you get to the actual yard itself and begin to pick up the casualties.

Atchley: Well, I don't actually remember the ride as being too exciting. I probably wasn't thinking too much of anything. We was just discussing, you know, what we were (chuckle) seeing and what was happening. Then when we got to the yard, of course, there was casualties to be found everywhere, and we were taking them to the main hospital.

Marcello: In the meantime, were the guns and so on still firing down in the harbor, and was the attack still going on?

Atchley: Right. I think they came over in different waves, but I wasn't actually thinking too much. I think I was just doing what they told me to do without realizing the consequences of what was really happening. I didn't realize that until later on.

Marcello: How many wounded personnel could you get on this ambulance at one time?

Atchley: Just two. But we started out taking them to the main hospital. The first two we took--that old Navy routine--we had. . . there was a Navy nurse, and she says . . . I forget the question she asked us, you know, but they had to fill out a bunch of paperwork, she thought, before she could enter them into the

hospital, and we changed her mind in a hurry on that. From then on, we didn't have any other problems getting them into the wards, and then they'd put them into whatever ward they needed to be in after they examined them.

Marcello: How many trips would you estimate that you were making back and forth between the hospital and the yard?

Atchley: I have no idea, but after a period of time--I don't know how long--of course, the hospital got full in a hurry, and maybe because of the communications, we started taking some of what we thought were the less serious cases up to our place, where they'd set up an emergency hospital places where we were, you know, sleeping--in our bunks.

Marcello: Now by this time, they evidently did have enough equipment and so on up at the mobile hospital where they could handle at least certain types of cases.

Atchley: Minor cases, right.

Marcello: What sort of cases would they be handling up there at the mobile hospital?

Atchley: Well, there were some burns, some wounds from either shrapnel or what-have-you, and shock, I presume. I remember one or two, you know, that was crazier than I was (chuckle), and I was supposed to be sane, you know. But things were happening so fast and furious that you really didn't really stop and think, you know, about what you were doing or what-have-you.

Marcello: I would assume that in a situation like this, where everything is happening so quickly, that you really don't have a chance to see the big picture. In other words, you know what you're supposed to do, and you're more or less living in your own little world. Is this a proper assessment?

Atchley: That's true. You wasn't really looking around seeing what was happening, you know, in an overall picture. You didn't realize and see until later on what had actually happened.

Marcello: How would you describe your own conduct throughout this action? Do you feel that you were relatively calm and collected as you went about performing your duties as an ambulance driver?

Atchley: I believe I was for the fact that I really didn't have enough sense at that time to be scared, and I think most everyone else that I knew was in the same boat. We didn't really realize the consequences of what was happening, and didn't, until that evening or maybe that afternoon--whenever we got discussing it. Then, you know, we got scared just talking about it and thinking about what could have happened to us and what did happen to everyone else, you know, and what could possibly happen that night or the next day. I think, actually, thinking what possibly could happen as far as being an invasion or what-have-you, knowing that we were helpless, scared us more than anything else after, you know, realizing what had already happened.

Marcello: Now you obviously had not had any practical experience as a corpsman, so did the fact that you were having to haul these wounded as an ambulance driver have any effect on you? In other words, did it shake you up in any way to see the types of wounds and so on that these men were receiving?

Atchley: Well, possibly not, because most of the ones that we were picking up were the ones that were walking around, or maybe, you know, would see the ambulance and holler, "I'm hurt! I need some attention!" Actually, I don't remember picking up anyone that was laying on the ground unconscious. I think that maybe the main hospital was, you know, having the corpsmen out doing that.

Marcello: How long did you remain as an ambulance driver here on Sunday? In other words, how long did this activity go on?

Atchley: Well, I guess probably on into the afternoon, as far as maybe taking patients back down to the main hospital that couldn't be taken care of there, or maybe after they'd given them the treatment they could give them, they needed further treatment. I don't really know how long it took to do that or how long it went on.

Marcello: Did it go on into the evening?

Atchley: I don't believe so. They might have, you know, periodically sent somebody down, but it was just an unusual case, I guess.

Marcello: Did you ever have any opportunity to observe what was happening up at the mobile hospital, even though you were, in effect, an ambulance driver?

Atchley: Yes, I knew what was going on up there, right. I mean, I was making trips up there, and as we'd go up there, sometimes we'd look down toward the harbor, you know, to see what was going on. I don't know what particular time the high altitude bombers came over, but I remember it was so pathetic seeing whatever gun we had--I think the five-inch was the biggest gun they had--you could see them as they exploded, and they wasn't even close to the airplanes, you know. So we thought that was pretty sickening that they could just fly over and just do whatever they wanted to do. Of course, they done whatever they wanted to do all day or however long the attack lasted.

Marcello: I gather that you really didn't come under either any direct or indirect attack while you were serving as an ambulance driver.

Atchley: Right. As far as I know . . . as far as the Navy's concerned, of course, they were after the ships and Ford Island. Then, of course, the airfields were farther away from us, so we didn't know what was going on there.

Marcello: Did you actually observe any of the activities that were taking place inside the hospital itself, even though you were serving as an ambulance driver? In other words, were you able to get out at any time and go into the hospital and see what was going on in there?

Atchley: No.

Marcello: Okay, so what is . . .

Atchley: Oh, excuse me. One thing I remembered, and always will remember, is that they didn't . . . a lot of the dead, as well as I can remember, they had them outside the hospital, and I would describe them as sort of stacked up like cordwood, which was a pretty horrible sight. I remember that more than I remember anything else--later on, you know, when I was thinking about the things that happened.

Marcello: Were there very many of the dead that were coming out of the hospital?

Atchley: Well, I don't know whether they were coming out of the hospital or whether they was picking them up around the harbor and just . . . somebody just decided they were dead there and just . . . because I remember they had sheets wrapped around them. Maybe they got them from the hospital. I'm sure they did. Of course, I don't know how they identified them later on. I don't know what happened to them.

Marcello: Well, what did you do that evening in the aftermath of the attack, that is, after you ceased to be an ambulance driver?

Atchley: Well, I was still an ambulance driver that night. We had an old wooden shack up there that was there when we started building the hospital. They called it the Red Cross shack. So they made that their headquarters for whatever doctor was in charge. In fact, the OD which was the doctor. I had

the ambulance watch that night, and we had a lieutenant commander, a doctor named . . . a radiologist from New York, a reservist, that hadn't been in the Navy very long, he was the OD.

Of course, I was laying . . . at the time . . . that night, also, as far as I could ascertain, we shot down some of our own planes off the Enterprise. I think there were about three or four.

Marcello: Were you able to see those fireworks in the harbor when that happened?

Atchley: Oh, my God (chuckle)!

Marcello: You might describe this affair. Where were you, and what sort of a view did you have of it?

Atchley: Well, like I say, I was asleep on the stretcher in the ambulance, and whenever all this fireworks started, well, of course, I raised up and got out of the ambulance and looked. They put up a barrage. There wasn't anything that could get through that night. This doctor . . . he was a real fine fellow, and we got to know each other pretty well during the time we were there. He come running out of the Red Cross shack (chuckle). At this time, he was still calling everybody mister. Regardless of whether they were seamen second class or what, he'd always call them Mr. So-and-So, you know. He didn't know about his rank and stuff. He says, "Mr. Atchley, do they attack at night, too?" (chuckle) I

says, "I presume they do," because I presumed that's what was happening at the time, you know.

Marcello: What sort of rumors were you hearing in the aftermath of the attack, that is, that evening?

Atchley: Oh, my gosh! Well, the main rumor that we heard was . . .of course, sometime before dark, they sent up a detachment of Marines up there because we were on a perimeter up there, you know. They were stationed along the top of this mountain and around to be lookouts, I presume. Some of our men from the hospital were still over in the jungle (chuckle). Some of them come back after dark, and some of them run into some of these Marines (chuckle).

And one of them in particular, Philo Nelson Kelly Inglesby, was a great big old bruiser, and he come wandering back, and one of the Marines challenged him and asked him who he was. I think he said, "I'm a half-Jap, half-Norwegian spy," or something to that effect, you know, not knowing anybody was there but us. About that time three Marines grabbed hold of him, and even though he had his uniform on, they took him down to the OD and made him identify himself before they'd turn him loose. That really calmed that big old fellow down, anyway, for a while.

Marcello: I'm sure it wasn't too safe to venture outside and walk around that night up there where you were because there probably were a lot of trigger-happy Marines up there.

Atchley: Well, that's true.

Marcello: Everybody was jittery.

Atchley: Right. Also, the rumor had got out--you was asking about rumors--that they had already invaded the other side of the island and were coming across. So we didn't know what to expect from that.

Marcello: Did you sleep very much at all that night?

Atchley: I don't imagine (chuckle).

Marcello: How about an appetite? Did you have very much of an appetite?

Atchley: I don't ever remember anything, during my whole Navy career, that kept me from eating (chuckle).

Marcello: Did your attitude toward the Japanese change any in the aftermath of the attack?

Atchley: Are you talking about the Japanese from Japan?

Marcello: Yes. As a result of the attack at Pearl Harbor, did your attitude toward those Japanese change, or any Japanese for that matter?

Atchley: Well, sure. It did. I think I had a pretty good hate for them.

Marcello: How about your attitude toward the Japanese in the Hawaiian Islands themselves?

Atchley: Well, I don't know this for a fact, but they say that, also, just before the attack, they had cars that they parked cross-wise in the streets and locked them, and that they had arrows cut in the cane fields and what-have-you. At the time, I probably

felt these were the Japanese that were living on the island that did this, but later on, I got to thinking that it was probably that they had infiltrated. Since there were so many Japanese there anyway, they wouldn't know whether they were American citizens or what-have-you. I presume that my attitude toward them was pretty bad at the time, although, like I said before, you couldn't really tell who was Japanese and who was Chinese and what-have-you. So I didn't ever pick out anybody to try to lambast or anything.

Marcello: What did you do the next day, that is, Monday, December 8th. You recall what your particular tasks were that day?

Atchley: I don't remember. I probably . . . I was still driving the ambulance, probably, for another couple of weeks . . . for taking people down and what-have-you.

I do remember . . . it wasn't the night of December 7th, but one time after dark we had to take a patient down to the main hospital, and, of course, there were no lights at all. You could look out in front of your hand couldn't see it. That was the most harrowing experience I took--driving down toward Pearl Harbor. Of course, being a field ambulance, we had fenders on it and had hospital equipment sitting on each fender to keep me from running off the road. But that really didn't bother me as much as knowing that . . . you were talking about those trigger-happy Marines. There was several people that got shot down in Pearl Harbor, and several of

them were civilians that hid in some of the buildings down there--and some of them might have been Japanese--and were afraid to come out for fear that they would get shot as soon as they were seen. I guess, presuming that logically so, they would shoot and ask later, you know, anybody that moved. So I was more concerned about (chuckle) driving down there and them not being able to see me and me not being able to see them, and then maybe getting shot, but nothing like that happened.

Marcello: When did you have your first opportunity to get a good first-hand view of the damage that had occurred down at Pearl Harbor?

Atchley: Well, that very same day.

Marcello: Describe the damage that you saw.

Atchley: Well . . .

Marcello: Let's take, for example, the surface of the water. What did it look like?

Atchley: Well, it was covered with oil and debris, floating debris. What I remember . . . I didn't know the names of the ships; I knew they were battleships. Of course, we got the word about the Arizona--that it was the Arizona that blew up. The Oklahoma--one ship--was turned completely upside down, which was the Oklahoma. The Tennessee and the Maryland were damaged, and, of course, we could see the Nevada. It had gotten underway, and then it got hit and it was beached.

We could see it. One of the times while the attack was going on or maybe after the attack, one of the dry docks--I don't know which one it was; where it was, I think it was a destroyer or destroyer escort or something in, but I forget the name of it--and it was just completely demolished. You know, that was a real sickening sight.

Marcello: This must have been the Shaw. Was it the Shaw?

Atchley: It might have been the Shaw. Was the Downes there?

Marcello: The Downes was there. The Cassin and Downes were together in dry dock, I believe.

Atchley: It might have been one of them. This one particular one was just completely demolished. In fact, there's an ironical twist there. The man who got killed at our hospital, his name was Thurman, I believe. He had a brother that was on one of those destroyers--might have been the Shaw--and he was on the fantail, supposedly, and got blown out into the water and got picked up by one of the smaller ships that got underway. He was gone for several days before they come back in. And because of the damage done to his ship, the first thing he did was come back up to the hospital to let his brother know he was all right, and he found out his brother had gotten killed.

Marcello: What sort of emotions did you experience when you had a chance to see the damage that had been done there in the harbor, that is, after things calmed down a little bit, maybe a

day or two later, and you've had a chance to see the damage? I'm sure there was still oil in the water, and, of course, there was for months and even years after that. The debris, I'm sure, was still floating around and so on. What sort of emotions did you experience? Do you recall?

Atchley: Well, I guess the main concern that I had was how we were going to defend ourselves until they could get some replacements for . . . a good part of our Navy was there, which, they knew was going to be there, and they completely knocked it out as far as the big ships were concerned. As far as I know, the Enterprise was supposed to have been in there, and they flattened the Utah, was it?

Marcello: Yes.

Atchley: I believe it was a training ship of some kind, and didn't have much superstructure on it, and they thought that was where the Enterprise was going to be. I think they demolished it pretty well.

Marcello: They did.

Atchley: So I guess our main concern was that they was going to come and take Pearl Harbor eventually, and what was going to happen to us. I think that was our main concern.

Marcello: In other words, it was a feeling of apprehension and helplessness, perhaps, as much as anything.

Atchley: Right.

Marcello: Okay, what sort of a lasting impression has December 7, 1941, made upon you?

Atchley: Militarily?

Marcello: Militarily, emotionally--however.

Atchley: Well, it'd be kind of hard to describe. You'd have to think about it awhile, I guess. Of course, I've had thirty-five years to think about it, but, I mean, I didn't really think about what specific thing. I guess one of the main impressions was the fact that we were surprised with all the advanced warning, supposedly, we had that we didn't pay any attention to. I'm a strong believer in having strong military. I believe we should always be militarily powerful enough to defend ourselves against anybody or everyone. Emotionally . . .

Marcello: Are you saying, in effect, then, that the Pearl Harbor experience perhaps taught you the value of having an alert military at all times or something of this nature? In other words, are you saying, in effect, that it possibly could happen again if . . .

Atchley: That's right. I believe in preventive measures, as far as attacking the United States is concerned. I believe that whatever measures that need to be taken, as far as surveillance is concerned, should be taken--only to protect our own interests, not for any other purpose.

Marcello: Before I interrupted you, you were going to say something about how Pearl Harbor affected you, perhaps, emotionally.

Atchley: Well, of course, when you think about it and think about all the people that were killed without any effort or without any opportunity to defend themselves, I feel like I was one of

the most lucky persons in not getting injured. I guess emotionally, as far as all the people that were left, the families not knowing what happened affected me.

Marcello: When were you able to get word home to your folks that you were still alive? I'm sure that they must have been worried about you.

Atchley: Well, I think it really didn't bother me too much since I was alive, and I didn't really think about what they were thinking about too much. I knew they probably, you know, figured I was all right, or they would have heard something, not knowing that really they wouldn't have. I think it was probably . . . it was several days before we were allowed to fill out a form that they mailed saying we were injured or not injured or we were all right.

There was a friend of the family, Mrs. Turner, that was a supervisor at the telephone company. She was a real close friend of the family, and she was trying her best to go through Pearl Harbor to find out what happened to me for my mother, you know, (chuckle) for my folks. In fact, she called me the last December 7th and said, "Do you know what I was doing on December 7th thirty-four years ago?"

But, of course, they were, you know, real upset and concerned about what happened to me--not knowing whether I was dead or not. But it really didn't bother me that much, knowing I was alive, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, well, Mr. Atchley, I don't have any more questions. Is there anything else that you think you would like to add and get as part of the record?

Atchley: Well, I could give you a little resume of the rest of my Navy service, which I've always been a military man. I've always loved the military. After my six years in the Navy, I joined the Reserves. The reason I joined the Reserves at that time was thinking I was going to come back in, and I wanted to protect . . . I was a chief hospital corpsman when my six years was up. But I didn't go back because I ended up in China when my enlistment was up. Some guys that came back before I did reenlisted and got thirty days' leave and were sitting back out in China. I didn't want that, so I didn't reenlist. But then I went out to the Naval Air Station and finished out a total of thirty-two years and seven months at the Naval Air Station. I was promoted from chief . . . I had a real up-and-down . . . I was made a warrant officer, W-1, and then W-2. Then they were going to phase out the warrants, so they had a selection committee, and I was selected to be an LDO officer in administration as a JG.

Marcello: Now you were selected to be a what kind of officer?

Atchley: They call in a LDO officer--limited duty officer.

Marcello: LDO?

Atchley: Right, administration. The reason they made it specific LDO officer is because you couldn't handle any kind of line duties

or ship. They'd make you either administration or supply or what-have-you. Then I got twice passed over for lieutenant commander, and so then I reverted back to warrant and ended up retiring as a CWO-4, which actually was . . . I was out there for the money, too, and I ended up with more money than if I'd been a lieutenant commander (chuckle). But that just about is the whole story as far as I know.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Atchley, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me. You've said some very interesting things, and I'm certain that historians will find them valuable someday when they write about Pearl Harbor from the standpoint of the enlisted man.

Atchley: Well, some of the things that I've said probably are not important. Some of the important things I probably didn't say, but someone else will pick them up anyway. I appreciate your coming out and interviewing me.